THE BANNER SERIES OF SELECTED SHORT STORIES

The Peace Offering

BY OCTAVE THANET

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THE strike had its edge on when Martin Wallace came to Burnside on his first detail as a reporter.

"Clear case of pull," snarled the man who had expected the assignment; "well, he'll make a holy mess of it!"

But therein he was wrong twice. It was not a case of influence, although Martin's father was a great friend of the proprietor; it was given the young fellow because one of the editors had taken a fancy to his stories in the "Harvard Advocate." Neither did Martin make a mess of the Burnside strike. For the latter good fortune he had old Oliver Jones to thank, at least in part. He made Oliver's acquaintance his first afternoon in town. The strike was two weeks old that day, which was time enough for the small tradesmen to be looking sharply after credits, and the wives to be ordering cautiously; time enough for the line of policemen bristling outside the great dingy bulk of the steel mills to have grown odious and menacing; time enough for the ceaseless clatter of the rolls, day and night, night and day, to taunt the idle men: "You are gone, but we don't stop! We won't stop!" and time enough for the painted sky behind the black chimneys to glow a baleful sign of blood and war. Martin passed dozens of sullen groups on his way down the wide, shady village street that ended in the "mill district." He heard snatches of wild talk at every corner.

One young man's face arrested him. It was because it was the only face that he had seen that was not lowering; this face was simply sad.

"Well, how's the strike?" said Martin, while his quick eyes took in all the young man's six feet of splendid muscles and his curly brown head. His features were rather delicate for such a big fellow. His eyes were small, but very bright, and of that sensitive gray which takes the hue of the light and the moment's feeling. He gave Martin a quick, unresponsive glance in return. On his part, perhaps, he took in the other man's well-cut clothes, his slight stature, his limp, and his reporter's pad.

"It's on," said he, coldly.

"Are you fellows going to win?"

"I don't know."

"I say"—Martin laughed, with a sudden friendliness in his face—"that isn't the answer I expected. But maybe you aren't one of the strikers?"

"I'm a striker fast enough, but I'm not God Almighty; and I guess He's the only one can tell how things are going to shape themselves at this stage of the game."

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With that he brushed off, as one who did not seek talk; he did not so much as turn his head to Martin's "I hear you are very orderly——"

Martin gave his attention to the people on the streets. The scattered groups were slowly drifting in one direction, toward the river, toward the steel works. The crowd lined up on the sidewalk opposite the long stockade that was a background for the patrol of police; it lined the street—and waited.

Presently the big red gates swung open and a little company of police marched out. Martin felt his pulses pricking. The crowd was like a hound in a leash straining forward, then hauled back by some invisible force.

"The scabs is coming!" screamed a child's pipe.

Behind the blue ranks Martin could see the new men. Some of them were farmers' lads, young, awkward, but undismayed, defying the scowling faces and insulting gestures. The others had bleached faces and hang-dog eyes, and slunk together. "They must have raked the slums," thought Martin. What surprised him very much was the quiet of the crowd; they scratched their wrists and yelled "Black sheep!" and "Scabs!" here and there, in scattering volleys of abuse; but for the most part they looked on in glowering silence. Last of the men, just in front of the police, a man walked alone. He was a man of another sort. Any one who knew steel workers could tell at a glance that he was a veteran steel man. He had taken off his hat to wipe his face and his bald head, which the August sun beaded with moisture. The face was round, florid, and, in spite of the discomfort and peril of his plight, had a kind of grin on it. His leather-guarded trousers and blue-checked shirt made the heavy gold watch chain dangling over his chest look incongruous. There were gray hairs in the scanty, red-brown fringe and stubby moustache, but his small gray eyes were sparkling, and he walked as lightly as a boy.

No sooner did this man come in good view of the crowd than an indescribable uproar broke out, one long, furious yell: "Scab!" "Scab!"

He retained the same unruffled composure. The air was full of threats and oaths. Why this one man was singled out more than the others Martin could not tell. More out of curiosity to know than for any other reason, he turned on his heel and followed the procession. The new men had a short distance to go—only to their boarding house, which was behind a stockade and patrolled by a policeman. But this one man, at a turning, slipped away into the streets. Not unobserved, for a dozen men left the crowd to follow him, offering no violence, but shouting "Scab!" and "Traitor!"

At the same moment the striker with whom Martin had talked and another man, a tall man in a red shirt, ran past the others and joined the cause of the cries.

"No swiping!" called the man in the red shirt, who showed to Martin a flushed, black-bearded face and a huge swinging fist. "You let him alone!"

The words were addressed to two or three of the crowd who had picked up stones and were in advance of the others.

The first of the crowd hurled a brick, calling that he'd kill a scab as quick as a mad dog. Instantly the big fist was in his face.

"Drop it!" cried the man in the red shirt. "You know the orders. Drop it, you fool!"

"And you keep off," shouted the other striker, his companion, to the next assailant.

"Aw, let 'em both come on and see how I can fight," said the pursued man, who had faced about and was putting up his fists with a cheerful air.

The two men fell back sullenly. "Scab! scab!" they cried in the rear.

"'Tis only a word," said the man; "I don't mind it."

The men, still yelling and jeering, fell back. But a woman, who had run abreast of the crowd, pushed herself into the van. She was a wild figure, with dishevelled dress and flying hair; and wilder was her shrill voice, screaming: "Noll Jones, I ain't under orders, and I'll mark you well, you scab, you black-hearted traitor!"

Both the men who had come to Noll Jones' assistance turned to catch her frantic arms; but Martin, who was the nimblest, caught her wrist, whirling her about. "Don't you do it," said he. "I'm a reporter, and it would get into the papers, and I'd make fun of you and say you were no lady!"

"Ye would, would ye? Ye little limping poodle dog!" she made a dart at him with her teeth in an excess of fury. Martin held her off from him; he was stronger than he looked. He shook his head at the young striker, who would have pulled the woman away.

"What good will it do the strike or you, either, to scratch me or call me bad names and make me suspect that you are not a decent woman?"—so he continued coolly, although his cheek was hot, for he did mind his limping—"you'll only make me think you have been drinking."

Her passion collapsed as swiftly as it had swelled. "I ain't then," she answered, "and Tom Neal knows it, and so does Mr. Walden. But my man's in bed with his head broke by dirty cops——"

"Pete got hurt yesterday, I guess, when he was fighting drunk," interposed the young man, Walden.

"Pete ain't a drinking man, Mr. Walden, no he ain't. Any man would git downhearted laying 'round idle from morning till night. He's got to go to the saloon to git the news; and then he takes a drop, and they git to talking, and he takes more'n he knows; and they all git excited."

"I guess you don't do anything to calm him, Mrs. Waters. I saw you at every meeting; and I guess you're on the street a good deal."

The woman bridled, but she did not explode again. The man in the red shirt said something about it's being hard on the women, too.

"Of course, I know you're wanting the news; but if you'll do a little washing instead of running the streets, I'll give it to you," said Walden.

"And here's a dollar for the kids," said Noll Jones.

The woman struck the silver out of his hand, and ran down the street.

"Your money's got blood on it, you scab!" she cried; "but I'll take the washing and thank you, Mr. Walden."

"She's a silly, violent woman," said Walden, with unexpected heat.

"Pshaw," said Noll, good-naturedly, picking up the coin and dusting it with his finger tips, "what do I care for the word! Judy's a good woman when she ain't in a bad temper. But I'm obliged to you, Mister Reporter, and to you Oscar, and"—he hesitated, while his lips twitched into a smile that seemed to conceal some other emotion—"it was—say, I'm very much obliged to you, Tom." He turned to the tall man, whose face flushed darkly as he dove his hands into his pockets, looking away from Jones' outstretched hand.

"We are running this strike in a decent, orderly way; but I won't shake hands with a scab, no matter who he is!" said he.

Jones winced, and the blood mounted to his forehead; but he kept the reins on his temper. "You'll see that different some day, I guess," he replied; "good afternoon; I'd ruther you wouldn't walk any further with me, it might hurt your reputation." The irony in the last words was the only sign he gave that Tom's jeer had cut.

"I'll go with you, Noll," said Walden.

"And I, if you'll let me," said Martin.

"Thank you, boys," said Jones; "good-bye, Tom."

But Tom's back was swinging down the street. He made no response.

Jones and the others continued their way, and Martin began to ask questions, prefacing them with an apology, which Noll Jones took in very good part. No, he didn't mind talking about the strike. "My name's Noll Jones; I guess everybody in Burnside knows me. I'm a roller at the Burnside Steel Works, the only roller who didn't strike. They used to call me a good fellow, now they call me a traitor and a bloody, black-hearted scab." He smiled amiably at Walden, who unaccountably sighed.

"How did you come to stick to the Burnside people when the others went out?" said Martin.

Noll chuckled: "Well, I guess you'll not understand much better'n I do, if I do tell you; and I ain't got it quite to rights in my own head, yet. It wasn't exactly because the boys are making kinder too big demands—though I guess they are; still, I got a good-sized pile laid up, and I can afford to lay by a few months well enough, stay quiet, wear my good clothes, and keep off the street, and sure to git back when the strike's over and nobody feeling hard. 'Noll Jones, he wasn't in none of the rows,' says the officers, 'he was all for law and order'; and 'Old Noll Jones, he walked right out with the boys,' says the boys; and it would be friendly all 'round. And 'nuff sight easier for me and Nanny—she's my daughter, all the child I got, and her ma's dead. And 'tain't that I mind the subscribing to the funds I'd have to do; I've always lived free and had something to throw in when they passed the hat. Ain't I, Oscar?"

"That's right," said Oscar.

"No, twasn't any of them things. But you see I worked in the Burnside mill ever since we come over from Wales, me a little kid of 12. And I'm 52 year old. I was there when old Foster Burnside owned the works. Say, he was a good man. I knew him well. He'd often stop and give me a word, passing. I guess it's a bad job he's dead, too. The widder sold the works to his cousins, him having no child to speak of—jest a lawyer."

"Judge Foster Burnside is a great lawyer, you know," Martin interposed.

"Maybe, maybe. Nice man, too; but no 'count for a steel mill. No doubt, though, lawyers has their place. But he didn't know rounds from ovals, and when he'd come in to see the mill, I was scared to death lest he'd git burned—never seemed to know which way to jump! So the works went to the second cousins and some other fellers. I ain't finding fault, but things haven't gone like they used to; there's about twice as many men and all sorts of new kinks with electricity and God knows what not; but I ain't seen the president to speak to three times, and most times we've had some kind of a dispute going on. But the superintendent, he's the same, and he asked me, personally, would I stick to 'em. I says, 'See here, if I stick to you, you know they'll call me a scab and my girl's mates won't speak to her and I wouldn't be so bad shunned if I had the smallpox'—ain't that right, Oscar?"

Walden nodded.

"'Now,' I says to him, 'if I risk that and they don't kill me or break my legs or blow me up, some way, and I stand by you and the firm, for the sake of old times, will you and the firm stand by me? Or will you make a kind of peace offering of me to git the boys back?' Says he, 'You stand by us, Noll, and, by God, we'll stand by you.' And there was the picture of the old man, old Foster Burnside, hanging up in the office, and I kinder looked up at it, for I thought an awful lot of the old man; and I says, 'There's my hand on it, I'll stick to you, no matter what the boys say.' And three of the boys on the eight-inch, Henry Wiser, Stumpy Dix, and Patsy Doornan, they stuck to me; but Long Tom, he went out with the boys. And I'm sorry to say, we had words first."

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"But you went out?"—Martin looked at Walden.

"Sure," said Walden.

"May I ask why?"

"I don't mind. It's just that I wasn't going back on the boys."

"Nor he ain't going back on me, neither," said Noll, laughing, "and that's what is hurting some of 'em bad. You see, Nanny's all the child I got. I had two boys, likely boys as ever you saw, wasn't they, Oscar?"

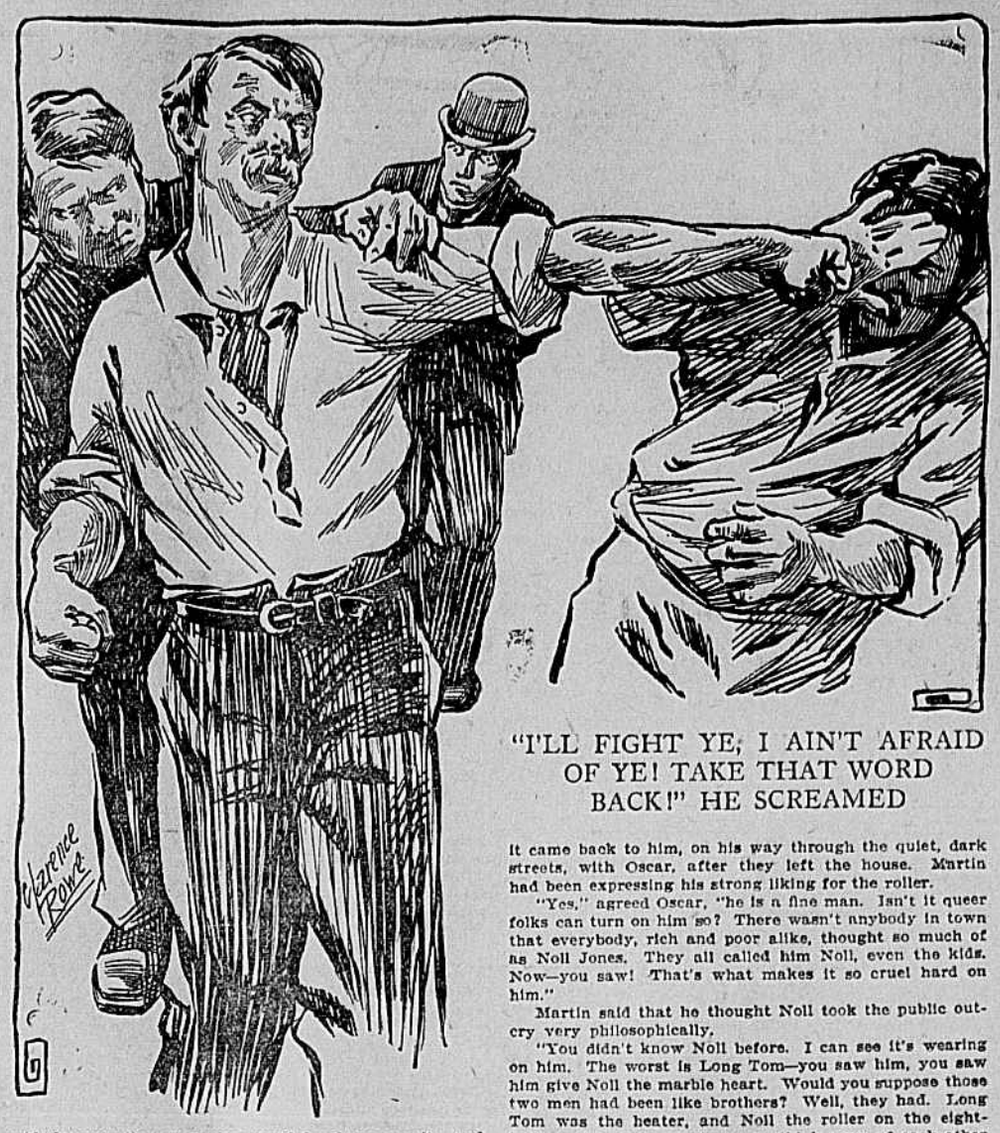
"I never saw such nice boys," said Oscar. He slipped his hand through Noll's arm, bending his tall head a little.

"Oliver was the oldest. He was educated, went to school, then he went to college."

Martin opened his eyes; then he recalled how much more considerable a sum the average good roller's wages make in a year than a clergyman's salary, and nodded.

"He took to learning like a duck does to water. There's awful good blood in our family on his mother's side. The missus was a lady, her pa was a minister, and I always kept her like a lady. I don't know the time she didn't have a hired girl, except jest when we were first married, and then we always hired a washerwoman. She took a deal of comfort in Oliver; but he had the pneumonia, and died while he was in college. Then, there was little Foster, that I named after the old man. Well, he was good to Foster; and when Foster was killed he went to the funeral. Foster was the kind of boy you couldn't help liking. Everybody liked him. He wouldn't go to school a day after he was 14—jest bound to git at the iron. He was my finisher when he was killed."

He must have read the touch of horror that wrinkled Martin's brow, because he added: "I dare say I ought to be thankful he wasn't burned; it was one of the pipes in the engine bursted, jest as they were a-fixing it. It hit Foster in the head; doctor said he never knew what hurt him. Then came 'round to me afterwards, one of the



"I'LL FIGHT YE, I AIN'T AFRAID OF YE! TAKE THAT WORD BACK!" HE SCREAMED

snide lawyers that go nosing round for damage suits, and wanted me to sue the company. I told him to get out, for it wasn't the company's fault. No more it was; minute they suspected that pipe they went to fixing it, and it bursted. I don't know how it got to the old man, but it did, and he was awful pleased about it. He wanted to put up a stone to Foster; but I told him I wasn't poor; I could put up stones to my children. 'I'll not forget the decent way you've acted, Noll,' says he, and he shook hands with me. The old man was always square. Do you know, he put up a wash room for the men to wash up for their dinners, with tables and chairs as well as lockers and wash places, and he had it called the Foster B. Jones room. The words are painted over the door. And long's he lived he sent papers and magazines there for the men to read."

"And since he died, you have been sending them yourself," said Oscar.

"'Cept what you send," retorted Noll, with a grin; "but this ain't what I was going to tell you. You see, 'bout this time my wife died; and there was jest Nanny and me. It was a mighty rough time; my wife was an awful good woman. And I always tried to remember it. I cut loose in the mill, sometimes, when things is aggravating, but they never heard me swear at home—well"—as a flicker kindled in Oscar's grave eyes—"damn, now and then, that ain't nothing, that might slip out me not knowing. But I mean I was particular. And there never was a kinder wife. So there was only Nanny and me left, and you can believe we think an awful lot of each other. I

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give Nanny a good education, but she got it right here, she'd never go away to school; and there's a young man studying for a doctor wants to marry her. And I tell you I was scared, he sat around in the parlor so much, and was so particular to call me 'Mister Jones,' and laughed so hard at my jokes; but Nanny never took to him; she took to Oscar, who had always played with her. She made a joke of it. 'I'm going to marry money, pa,' says she, 'not position. I'm going to take Oscar, who can make more money than any of them. And a steel worker can be just as good a gentleman as anybody.' She's right, too; steel workers are a awful pleasant, nice lot of fellows."

Martin thought of the scene 'round the corner. Noll looked at him sharply and laughed. "Why, you don't call that anything, down there," with a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder; "that ain't nothing. Besides, a strike's jest war; and folks lose their heads in a war. Why, they wanted Oscar to break with Nanny 'cause she was a scab's daughter. He had to lick two fellers before they saw things right. Lots of 'em objected 'cause he comes to the house, but he says he's going to see his sweetheart at her father's house and he's going to treat his father-in-law decent."

"I would be a pretty poor try for a man if I did anything else," said Oscar.

The other man looked at him with a frank affection that touched the young reporter, fresh from his college friendships; he cleared his throat before he spoke. "Oh, Oscar's all right. Nanny and I would be kinder lonesome, wasn't for Oscar. Well, here's the house."

The yard was large and in good order. The house stood far back from the street, a pretty wooden house, newly painted, with fanciful windows and a wide disk of piazza. A bent and grizzled old man, so decrepit one would not expect to see him working anywhere outside of a street-cleaning gang, was pottering over the lawn.

"Hullo, where's Ross?" exclaimed Oscar. "They didn't——"

"Oh, yes, they did," said Noll, grimly. "Wife and 'leven children to keep; but couldn't stand it working for a scab, he said. So Nanny got old Flint, who ain't much to work, but at least they can't coax him away. And they got the girl off, too. Yes. Nanny's given that girl I don't know how much clothes for her wedding. She was going to marry, Mr. Wallace, marry a feller used to be a rooster for the Burnsides, and struck with the other boys. He got pretty full and come round to her last Sunday, and told Mary she'd got to quit us or he'd quit her. You know how he'd talk. So she cried all night, and didn't put her clothes to soak, and after breakfast she come to Nanny, and Nanny advised her to go and not have trouble with her young man. Come in."

"But you haven't got any girl, and——"

"Don't you suppose Nanny can cook a supper? But we've got a girl, jest in from the country and got a brother 'mong the new men. Mr. Wallace, I don't like to urge you, for folks might make it uncomfortable if you came, but I'd be glad to see you."

Martin had not thought to go further, but the last sentence was like a spur to the young fellow's mettled spirit. He answered promptly, "If my coming will not inconvenience Miss Jones, I shall be glad to come, Mr. Jones."

"That's right—all but the Mr. Jones; my friends all call me Noll."

"And mine call me Martin," said the young fellow, impulsively.

Jones held out his hand, and Martin shook it; and thus the pact was formed.

Martin found Nanny a pretty, modest young girl, who looked like hundreds of young American girls in her street suit, but who had a soft Welsh voice. The supper was well cooked and well served; and Martin's welcome was so warm that it touched him. His heart opened to these simple, frank people, who were so glad to see him. And the more readily must through all the good cheer and galety and affection of the three, he seemed to hear the heavy step of invisible, but ever approaching danger. It sounded whenever he detected Nanny's veering the subject if it looked toward the strike; it sounded whenever he caught Oscar's melancholy glance on its way to his sweetheart's averted face. He had to put the fancy out of his head by force. Then he enjoyed the evening. But it came back to him, on his way through the quiet, dark streets, with Oscar, after they left the house. Martin had been expressing his strong liking for the roller.

"Yes," agreed Oscar, "he is a fine man. Isn't it queer folks can turn on him so? There wasn't anybody in town that everybody, rich and poor alike, thought so much of as Noll Jones. They all called him Noll, even the kids. Now—you saw! That's what makes it so cruel hard on him."

Martin said that he thought Noll took the public outcry very philosophically.

"You didn't know Noll before. I can see it's wearing on him. The worst is Long Tom—you saw him, you saw him give Noll the marble heart. Would you suppose those two men had been like brothers? Well, they had. Long Tom was the heater, and Noll the roller on the eight-inch; and I never saw two men think more of each other seemingly. When Tom's boy died Miss Nanny was there for a week. It was diphtheria; but Noll let her go—he thought as much of Tom as that!"

"And yet Tom went back on him?"

"I don't see how he could; but I tell you, Mr. Wallace, there ain't a thing on earth or in hell that we working men are so afraid of as that word scab. First Tom was trying to argue Noll out of the notion of sticking to the company; and from arguing they got to disputing, and from disputing they got to flinging names back and forth. And, finally, they were both mad; and Long Tom swore before all the mill that he'd never speak to Noll until he came out and joined his mates. He didn't say a word to him until today. And they used to be 'most every night together, his house or Noll's; and now, poor Mrs. Neal slinks across the street and goes blocks out of her way not to meet Noll or Miss Nanny and have to pass 'em by or have a row with Tom. And Tom's drinking lots more than is good for him. It's bad all round. The worst is things won't mend. And—I don't see how Noll's going to stand it!"

"What do you mean? The strike will end somehow."

"I don't know which way it will end. One thing I know, and all the rest of us know, they'll want the old men back. Whether they lick us or we lick them, they want the old men back. And we'll get back, some way. And then there'll be bad blood with Noll. And if we lick them—and we're just as likely and maybe a little more—they'll throw Noll over. And it will 'most kill him."

Oscar spoke with a suppressed vehemence that was startling in so quiet a fellow.

"But do you think the company will throw him over? It—why, it would be atrocious!"

"Well, they will, just the same. It will be 'We'll come back if you bounce Noll Jones;' and they ain't going to lose the thousands of dollars they're losing every day, a day longer than necessary, after they decide to throw up the sponge, only to keep on one man! No, sir. What do they do all the while? Do they keep these scabs they're so keen to hire? Never; not even when they can do the work. And it's the same with the old men when they scab. The other fellows ask for their heads, and they get them, too! And it's knowing that makes men scary of sticking to the bosses. They know that when it comes to a question of losing money or breaking their word to them, they'll go."

Oscar might have said more, but at this moment they were joined by some young workmen, acquaintances of Oscar, and the subject dropped of necessity.

Martin remained in Burnside a day longer. He wrote an account of the strike, which the old man said showed "a good nose for news," and he gave a picture of the Welsh roller that tickled the original. Nanny got a dozen papers in her filial delight. But he judged it kinder to Oscar to omit him entirely, in which judgment he was confirmed by Oscar himself.

A month passed before Martin was in Burnside again. The strike by this time had slipped into a paragraph. The men continued "to excite admiration by their quiet and orderly behavior"; but for this they had some warrant in "a growing belief that the strikers would win."

Martin came on a Sunday morning, and took his way from the station to Noll's house without pause. The church bells were ringing, and he met little groups in their Sunday clothes leisurely pacing the streets. The air was still, with golden motes in it, where the sun shone on the dust. The wide village street was dappled with shadows of elm trees. He heard a child's laugh now and then from the passing churchgoers. The perfume of tea roses was wafted to him from the little gardens that prospered on either side. The scene was so tranquil, so homely and gentle, that Martin sighed for memory of his own peaceful Western town that was not too large to have its homes set in gardens. At this moment his ears were smitten with a piercing childish din, and there burst round the corner a hooting mob of lads and little boys who danced at a safe distance from a furious man, yelling "Scab! Scab!" and accompanying the word with all the indecency of gesture that their small wits could compass.

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Martin began to laugh at their antics, but suddenly uttered an exclamation: "Thunder! that's Noll!"

Simultaneously, one of the imps stumbled and fell, and like a thunderbolt the pursuer was upon him. The rage in the Welshman's face shocked Martin, who was near enough to see what a little creature it was that he was choking, and even to perceive the child's face whiten and his bony little chest pant. But Noll bared his teeth at him with a grin of hate. "Will you call me scab? Will you, ye little —— ——!" he bellowed.

The boy struggled to speak, but the breath merely whistled through his nostrils. Noll must have felt his heart pounding against his ribs. "Was you one of the boys chased Johnny and tried to steal my dinner?"

Supreme anguish squeezed. "No, sir, please, sir, no, sir!" out of the gulping throat under his hand. Martin, however, had observed that Noll was holding his captive in a looser grasp. "Yes, you was too," growled Noll. "I saw you. I'd ought to lambast you well!" (Heart-shaking pause during which the boy sobbed aloud.) "I would if you wasn't so little. You tell your father, if you've got one, he won't git off so easy if he tries that name on me. Now, show me how you can run!"

He flung the boy off, and stood sombrely watching him scamper after his comrades as fast as his limp legs would let him. At Martin's hail, he turned, bristling, his fists up; it was a second before he recognized the face, then he forced a sorry smile. "Hullo, I'm glad to see you. Same old story, you see, me gitting mad. I've licked five men this last week. By —— I won't stand 'em slinging that word at me!"

His words gave Martin a chill; this was not the jovial philosopher who had so cheerfully defied the crowd three weeks ago.

"How's the strike?" said Martin—he said the first thing that entered his head to give his thoughts a chance to rally; he felt confused, like a man who expects to step into soft clay and finds himself on a bed of nettles.

"I dunno," returned Noll, morosely; "I know they have the worst lot of skunks in the country working. The chimneys keep a smoking, a smoking; but I tell you in confidence, we could haul every bit of decent iron we've made in a month on one wheelbarrow! Oh, they're rank!"

"But I thought you had three men——"

"So'd I think so. I don't know. They all weakened. Patsy, the best of 'em, he went West. The others, they joined the strikers, so's not to be called scabs."

He shrugged his shoulders in a queer way, clinching his fists and loosening the fingers and his muscles suddenly. One would say it was not so much a gesture of indifference as of pain. "I don't know's I blame them," said he, drearily; "it's hell, having that word in your ears all the time. And all the old faces that used to be so friendly turned away from you. Not a house you can so much as go to in a case of sickness. My woodshed caught fire. Was it them set it afire? I don't know; I know it was afire in the night, and not one of the neighbors come to help me fight it, not even Tom Neal. Nanny and me fought it alone, till Oscar came with the fire department, and they put it out. Yes, and somehow Oscar got hit on the head that night, and he's been in bed ever since. Yes, sir"—he spread out both his hands, and Martin saw how changed and hueless his ruddy face had grown—"yes, sir, folks in the office, the cops, and them say, 'You keep your temper, Noll; don't fly at 'em; take 'em easy!' My God, if I didn't fly at 'em and fight 'em, I'd go crazy! I hear 'em yelping that word at me all night. I've got so I'm scared to sleep. Why, Martin, two months ago I used to look 'round this town and say, 'I ain't got an enemy in it!' Now I ain't got a friend."

"Oh, brace up, old man," Martin tried to comfort him, as he would have tried to comfort one of his chums. He took him gently by the arm. "There's the superintendent, surely he's your friend."

"I ain't so sure. Sometimes I think he'll go back on me, too. I don't see no way out. Say, Martin, won't you come and see Nanny?"

More and more, as Martin walked by Noll's side, he marveled at the woful change in him. He no longer trod with the easy lightness that one acquires dodging hot iron; he had a listless, heavy-gaited slouch; yet his eyes were darting everywhere. His talk showed the irritability of his nerves; he did not seem like the same man. There was a reason why Martin should feel an intense pity for him, which he could not show except by an added friendliness of demeanor.

It was some time before he perceived that they were not going in the direction of Noll's house, and a minute or so after this discovery before he ventured to suggest it, in a tentative, offhand way, "Why, you're going in a new way to your house."

Noll had been sunk in a black reverie; he looked up suddenly. "What's that, Foster?" said he, in a very gentle voice. The pity of it all, remembering what he knew, caught Martin by the throat; he had to fish for his voice for a second.

Noll's eyes slowly took in his new friend's figure; he rubbed them with his hands. "I guess I forgot; it's not sleeping for sech a long while makes me sorter lose myself and talk out my thoughts. No, Martin, I ain't going home. I'm going to the works to see Mr. Blake, the superintendent. He wants to have a talk with me. Would you mind going with me?"

Martin was glad to go, feeling a nervous dread of the interview at the same time. Noll did not seem to see the half a dozen men who came down the sidewalk in front of the office just as they turned in. Martin remarked them, and Tom Neal among them; Tom looked two ways at once and stopping twice as if to turn back, yet each time going on the more briskly. He did not wonder how they got inside the cordon of police; he thought that he knew.

Blake greeted Noll with a surprising effusion of cordiality; but gave Martin a very cool stare, saying that he wanted to see Noll alone.

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"That's all right, Mr. Blake," said Noll, "I asked him to come. I guess I know what you wanted to see me about. The boys will come back if you'll lay me off. And you got some big orders. And the boys have given up considerable, and it's losing a lot of money not to throw me over. Ain't that it?"

Blake was an elderly man, with a florid, good-natured face, that reddened more deeply at Noll's words. "It's bitter medicine to take, Noll," said he; "but I'm helpless. But I'll find just as good a job for you somewhere else. Sorry don't count much, but I am sorrier about this than I ever was in my life—sit down, Noll."

Noll was standing, both his hands on an office chair; it was almost as if he needed the chair to make him keep erect, and there were blue and white lines about his mouth; but he straightened himself and answered steadily: "No, thank you, I got to be going. I won't come back, then. Good morning."

He nodded his head, and walked very straight to the door, but something must have blurred his eyes, for he ran into the casing on one side, instantly recovering himself and stepping back.

Blake had jumped up and was at his side. "Won't you come back a minute? I feel like sin over this; I do; I'm sick! Let me show you the letter I've written——"

"Tomorrow," said Noll; "I ain't well."

He put his hand up uncertainly to his head, moving the head itself slowly from side to side. His eyes, which were very dull, rested a second on the portrait of Burnside on the wall, while a kind of spasm convulsed his face; it was only for the space of an eye-blink, however, and instantly he braced his muscles and walked out of the door. Martin had his arm about him all the time, a support of which he did not appear to be conscious. He was walking quite firmly and of his own strength until they reached the sidewalk. Then, without warning, he swayed heavily against Martin, and it was all the young man could do to let him slip by degrees to the ground. There he lay like a log, and Martin's first glimpse of his purple red face made him cry out for help. It was Tom Neal who was waiting and lifted the unconscious man; but two or three policemen came at the same moment, and presently Oscar Walden, very pale and grim.

They sent for a doctor; but before he could come, Noll opened his eyes. His first motion was to feel his throat and the loosened collar, his next to dash the water off his dripping hair; then he struggled to rise, gurgling, "You let me up. I ain't hurted bad. I can fight!"

"Noll, you lay still, it's all right," blubbered Long Tom, suddenly beginning to cry; "jest old Tom. I was a fool to be mad with you, Noll, and if you only forgive me, I'll go off West with you and work in a black-sheep mill, I will by——!"

Noll wriggled out of his grasp, and struck feebly at Oscar on the other side.

"I'll fight ye, I ain't afraid of you! Take the word back!" he screamed.

"Oh, Lord! he don't know us," groaned Oscar.

* * * *

Martin Wallace called by appointment on the president of the Burnside Steel Works. He found him a young man of attractive appearance, but, in spite of his man-of-the-world air, struggling with considerable agitation. The president plunged into his subject at once. He supposed he might find fault with the article that Mr. Wallace had written on the conclusion of the Burnside strike, but——"

"You have seen Judge Foster Burnside, and know it's all true," interrupted Martin.

"That's it, Mr. Wallace. It places me in a—in a confusedly embarrassing position. I can assure you, until I saw Foster and knew about this roller, I didn't realize why Blake made such a racket about him. I am not the kind of a man this would imply. I simply wanted to get out of a disastrous struggle the best way possible. I did not understand that our word was engaged. I supposed an equivalent job would make it all right. So we all did. Now, I'm told he was so cut up that he had a stroke of apoplexy, and that he was a very good fellow. Isn't there some way to get this mess cleared up? You can see it is clearly impossible for us to take him back here. But I will buy his house here, myself, for a good advance on what he paid, and I'll get him just as good a job in a branch mill. Can't you see him for me and make some arrangement? You understand, don't you, how cursed mean I feel about it?"

"I understand," said Martin, gravely, "but I don't see what can be done. Noll Jones is in the Hunter Insane Asylum, and God only knows whether there is any chance of his recovery."